

**Water Policy Interim Committee
Tim Baker
March 5, 2018**

**Northwest Power and Conservation Council Response to Letter from Water
Policy Committee**

- Thank you for your interest in this important matter and for your letter last October. The Montana Members of the Council worked closely with Council leadership to respond, which we did on October 25th.
- Council has been keeping an eye on this issue for a number of years and has been proactive. For example:
 - In 2010 the Council commissioned a report to estimate the costs to the Columbia Basin of an infestation of zebra/quagga mussels. It concluded that annual costs would be in the tens to hundreds of millions of dollars.
 - Because of this and the potential negative impacts an infestation could have on fish and wildlife, and our related investments, in the Columbia Basin, the Council in its 2014 Fish and Wildlife Program made addressing non-native and invasive species a top priority (Program language on non-natives and invasive species given to committee members). One sentence states, "Currently, the greatest known threat in the Columbia River Basin from aquatic invasive species is introduction into the basin of zebra or quagga mussels." The Council included language in the program that promotes monitoring, early detection, rapid response, and public education in response to the threat.
 - The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) has an obligation to act in a manner consistent the Council's program. To that end over the last number of years BPA has contracted with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission to help support a mussel prevention program in the Columbia Basin. BPA has also spent monies focused on sampling and analysis, prevention, and treatment.

- There have been a few requests for BPA to increase its spending in this area. This is tricky because while everyone agrees on the threat posed by a mussel invasion, BPA has a very specific directive to focus its fish and wildlife expenses on mitigation for the construction and inundation of the federal hydrosystem. BPA is also funded by the region's ratepayers, including most of the electrical cooperatives in Western Montana and their customers. Some of you might know BPA is in a very tight financial situation right now, and has been cutting costs in most areas of its organization to try and avoid any further rate increases to its power customers, including those in Montana.
- The Council is just starting the process to amend its Fish and Wildlife Program and I'm sure we will again emphasize the importance of preventing the introduction of non-native and invasive species like zebra and quagga mussels in the Columbia Basin.
- Recognizing BPA's financial situation the Council has focused on federal legislation and appropriations. Over the last number of years the Council has been in close contact with the Northwest congressional delegation, including visits by various Council Members and staff to Washington, D.C. and letters in support of federal funding for this effort. The Council also hosts an annual congressional staff tour at various locations in the Columbia Basin where we get to discuss issues like this with key congressional staffers from the Pacific Northwest. This last year \$5 million was appropriated via the Corps of Engineers for this effort of which Montana received \$1.9 million.
- Just this last week the Council had further communication with key members of Congress supporting \$6 million dollars in 2019 appropriations, \$1 million more than this last year, for inspection stations, monitoring and rapid response activities in Montana and the Pacific Northwest.